

NAME: **Therese Cloonan**
TITLE : **Ten Years**
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Characters: 2 women (Jess: 30s, Woman: 50s)

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A WOMAN AND A GIRL, JESS.

WOMAN: So.

JESS: So.

WOMAN: (FEELS JESS'S FACE) Long time.

JESS: I know. Ten years.

WOMAN: You've changed.

JESS: You haven't.

WOMAN: Well, what's been happening?

JESS: Oh, I don't know. Not much. Nothing. Everything.

WOMAN: You've got to tell me something.

JESS: Feels a bit weird, doesn't it?

WOMAN: It should be normal enough. We've done this before.

JESS: I know, but, you know...

WOMAN: Tell me anything.

JESS: Um...there's a roundabout down the street now. And speed bumps everywhere.

WOMAN: Right. OK.

JESS: The pie shop on the corner changed owners. Awful pies.

WOMAN: Josie's?

JESS: Josie's. No more home-made pasties.

WOMAN: (GASPS) No! Oh, I bet Jack's...

JESS: Devastated.

WOMAN LAUGHS. AWKWARD SILENCE.

JESS: Um...Mr O'Sullivan over the road...he, um...he's...

WOMAN: I know.

JESS: Ah.

WOMAN: What happened in the end?

JESS: Not sure. Tumour. No, an aneurysm. I don't know. He was just...sick.

WOMAN: He was always sick. Poor fellow.

JESS: Howard's out.

WOMAN: Johnny?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: Really? Who's in?

JESS: Rudd. Remember him?

WOMAN: Yes. Grey hair. Glasses.

JESS: That's right.

WOMAN: Guess it was time.

JESS: It was.

PAUSE.

JESS: How long are you here for?

WOMAN: I don't know. I just got here.

JESS: You'll have to leave soon, won't you?

WOMAN: Not yet.

JESS: Oh, good. (PAUSE) Did you know Cath had a baby?

WOMAN: No.

JESS: I don't know what you know and what you don't.

WOMAN: What did she have?

JESS: A girl.

WOMAN: Oh, lovely!

JESS: There's five now. Five girls.

WOMAN: Good breeders, you kids.

JESS: Two are named after you. Sort of. Nora. Hannah.

WOMAN: That's very sweet.

JESS: I think it's a bit mental, actually.

WOMAN: Why do you say that?

JESS: Like it brings you back somehow. Makes things better or something.

WOMAN: Ah! You've still got your bite!

JESS: Well, they're nothing like you.

WOMAN NODS.

JESS: Pete moved to Perth.

WOMAN: Oh, he did? Work?

JESS: Work. He got a good offer, I think.

PAUSE.

WOMAN: And what about you?

JESS: What about me?

WOMAN: Tell me something.

JESS: Me? I don't know. Nothing. Not much to tell.

WOMAN: So have you travelled? Done that big trip?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: You went to Paris?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: Did you see it, the chapel?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: The orchestra?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: And?

JESS: Amazing.

WOMAN: Did you go to that shop I...?

JESS: Yep, it's still there.

WOMAN: The pastries!

JESS: The pastries!!

WOMAN: You climbed the tower?

JESS: Yep.

WOMAN: Great.

JESS: Great.

WOMAN: Told you it was special.

PAUSE. WOMAN NOTICES FLOWERS IN A VASE.

WOMAN: Nice flowers. Did you put them there?

JESS: No. I don't like them.

WOMAN: (SURPRISED) You don't like flowers?

JESS: I hate the smell.

WOMAN: They smell nice.

JESS: They're OK at first, then...ugh! That horrible stench. Gets right in your nostrils.

WOMAN: When they wither.

JESS: And the filthy water. Disgusting.

WOMAN: Mmm.

JESS: Gross.

WOMAN: Well, I think they're beautiful.

JESS: They remind me...

WOMAN: What?

JESS: When you left. Flowers everywhere. Stinking up the house.

WOMAN: I see.

JESS: No-one wanted to talk or stay very long. They'd leave their flowers and food and scurry away.

WOMAN: They didn't know what to say.

JESS: There was nothing to say.

PAUSE.

JESS: Fucking flowers.

WOMAN: No need to swear.

JESS: No-one ever tells me off for swearing anymore. No-one gives a shit.

WOMAN: Stop it. It sounds dreadful!

JESS: I know.

PAUSE.

WOMAN: I don't know what to say.

JESS: Neither do I. "Hello. What a lovely surprise! Sit down. Make yourself comfortable."

WOMAN: Perhaps.

JESS: And then, "Oh, you off already? See you later. Goodbye." I'm not doing that. No way.

WOMAN: Doing what?

JESS: Goodbye.

WOMAN: We did it once, you remember?

JESS: Yes, I remember, and I'm not doing it again.

PAUSE.

JESS: Do you recognise me?

WOMAN: Of course I do.

JESS: Do I look old? Weathered? Pasty? Different? Fat? Skinny? Like an albino?

WOMAN: What are you talking about? You look beautiful.

JESS: No-one ever says things like that to me. Nobody. I mean, really, why would they? Who would?

WOMAN: Your mother.

JESS: You know, all these years, I've been thinking, "Was she joking?! Do all mums say that to their kids? Even the ugly ones?"

BOTH LAUGH.

WOMAN: (SIGHS) Where to start?

JESS: Yeah. "What's happening? What've you been up to?" Ridiculous!

WOMAN: We could try.

JESS: Like there are any words. Any at all!

WOMAN: It's nice to be here, just sitting with you, in that same old way.

JESS: I don't even know if you're really here. What this is. Whether I'm going crazy. Whether I'm dreaming.

WOMAN: We're just having a chat.

JESS: (SCOFFS, SARCASTIC) Mmm. Nice little chat.

SILENCE.

WOMAN: Oh, Jess. I remember that.

JESS: What?

WOMAN: The sarcasm. Your silence. You clamming up.

JESS: Mmm.

WOMAN: You're annoyed. Upset.

JESS: No, I'm OK.

WOMAN: You're a bit stroppy.

JESS: (LAUGHS) No-one else ever says that. 'Stroppy'.

WOMAN SIGHS. SHE LOOKS AT HER WATCH AND MOVES ABOUT IN HER SEAT.

JESS: Do you have to go?

WOMAN: No.

SILENCE.

JESS: I never thought you'd go. Anywhere.

WOMAN: Neither did I.

JESS: I'm sorry. I'm not very good company. Maybe you won't like me, how I've turned out. Maybe I'm different now.

WOMAN: Don't be silly.

JESS: Hey, your arms. (REACHES OUT. TOUCHES WOMAN'S ARM)

WOMAN: What about them?

JESS: No more bruises.

WOMAN: Nope. All gone!

JESS: God, you were like a pin cushion.

WOMAN: (SHUDDERS) Oh, the needles. I hated the needles!

JESS: They poked you and prodded you. They cut your skin.

WOMAN: They had to.

JESS: You were in so much pain.

WOMAN: Oh, it wasn't that bad.

JESS: (LAUGHS DISBELIEVINGLY) It wasn't that bad?! It was so! It was bloody horrible! It was awful!

WOMAN: Jess...

JESS: Are you mad? Don't you remember when the doctors took too long topping up your morphine? Don't you remember?!

WOMAN: It's alright.

JESS: It's not alright! Bloody doctors!

WOMAN: No more. It's over.

JESS: Yeah, it's over.

PAUSE.

WOMAN: Maybe we should have a cup of tea.

JESS: But you can't even drink!

WOMAN: I know.

JESS: So how can we?

WOMAN: It just sounded nice.

JESS: It did, didn't it?

WOMAN: I wanted to pretend I was like you. Strong, fit. Alive. Your pretty hair. Nice clothes. Soft skin.

JESS: Oh, God. I'm so sorry.

WOMAN: Me too.

JESS: I didn't mean...

WOMAN: It's OK, love.

PAUSE.

WOMAN: Can I ask...

JESS: Yes?

WOMAN: Your father?

JESS: Mmm.

WOMAN: How is he?

JESS: Oh, I don't know. Not great.

WOMAN: Right.

JESS: He's not feeling so good.

WOMAN: Oh?

JESS: Nope. He's not well.

WOMAN: No?

JESS: Not well at all.

WOMAN: Dear. I didn't know.

PAUSE.

WOMAN: And you? What about you?

JESS: What about me?

WOMAN: You haven't said much about yourself. Not really.

JESS: I'm fine.

WOMAN: Are you eating alright?

JESS: Plenty.

WOMAN: Three meals?

JESS: Yes.

WOMAN: Fruit?

JESS: Yes.

WOMAN: Vegies?

JESS: (SNAPS) Yes!

WOMAN: You're toey again!

JESS: Toey? No!

WOMAN: You are!

JESS: I'm not!

WOMAN: I know you. I made you!

JESS: I'm OK.

WOMAN: You don't sound OK.

SILENCE FOR A LONG WHILE. JESS IS AGITATED.

WOMAN: What is it?

JESS: It's just...you put me here! You bloody dumped me here and...

WOMAN: You belong here.

JESS: ..then you just disappeared!

WOMAN: Darling...

JESS: I'm so sick of it! Thinking of you, missing you.

WOMAN: So am I.

JESS: Every day for ten years!

WOMAN: I know.

JESS: Every single day! It doesn't go away.

WOMAN: That's the way it is.

JESS: All these days. Weeks. Years. All this time.

WOMAN: So much has happened.

JESS: Nothing has happened!

WOMAN: So much has changed.

JESS: Not really. The sun comes up. The sun goes down.

WOMAN: That's how the world works. That's life.

JESS: You're so accepting of it all! Like it's no big deal.

WOMAN: Of course it's a big deal. Of course it is.

JESS: Well, why aren't you pissed off? Why so calm, hey? Why so bloody calm?

WOMAN: Why so angry?

JESS: Because I can be! You're my mother!

WOMAN: What does that mean?

JESS: I can do this, can't I? I can be cross, emotional, sad, grumpy, stupid. It was alright by you.

WOMAN: Of course.

JESS: You'll forgive me.

WOMAN: I will.

JESS: I can slam the door. Lock myself in my room. Run away to a friend's house. What a brat I was!

WOMAN: You were just a child.

JESS: But you'd always be there. In the kitchen peeling the potatoes. In the laundry ironing. In the garden weeding. You'd never leave. *You'd* never run away.

WOMAN: I couldn't run. I was too tired.

JESS: Well, you wouldn't have been! If we'd got you to the doctor earlier! If they'd checked you properly! Done their job before it was too bloody late!

WOMAN: It wasn't their fault.

JESS: We neglected you. We let you down.

WOMAN: Don't be ridiculous.

JESS: You spent your whole life looking after us. But who was looking after you, Mum? Who?!

WOMAN: You're being dramatic.

JESS: "I'm sorry. We can't fit you in unless it's an emergency." An emergency!

WOMAN: Jess!

JESS: What's an emergency? A bloody corpse in their waiting room? Is that what they wanted to see?

WOMAN: Stop it.

JESS: It was a big mistake. And a very, very costly one.

WOMAN: There are no mistakes. God doesn't *do* mistakes.

JESS: God doesn't do anything, does he? He just sits back and watches. Probably laughs.

WOMAN: That's not true.

PAUSE.

JESS: Sorry.

WOMAN: I was hoping you were happy.

JESS: I am.

WOMAN: You are?

JESS: Um...yeah. I think so.

WOMAN: Tell me. Tell me how.

JESS: Oh, you know. I've got a good job. A nice place to live.

WOMAN: That's good.

JESS: I travel. I go to nice restaurants. I see movies and shows and musicals.

WOMAN: Oh, how lovely.

JESS: I go out. I laugh. I dance. I have fun.

WOMAN: I told you you'd be OK.

JESS: I am OK.

JESS CRIES.

WOMAN: What's wrong?

JESS: I'm sorry.

WOMAN: Why?

JESS: We got separated too early.

WOMAN: It's not your fault.

JESS: They didn't do enough.

WOMAN: They did everything they could.

JESS: You were robbed.

WOMAN: I had a good time, you know. A good life.

JESS: You should've had more time.

WOMAN: You know, I had a wonderful time.

JESS: Really?

WOMAN: Really. I did.

JESS: Are you sure?

WOMAN: Yes, I'm sure.

JESS: They cut you. They couldn't fix you.

WOMAN: Shh. No more. No more needles.

JESS: No more doctors. (TAKE WOMAN'S ARMS)

WOMAN: No more bruises.

JESS: No more bruises.

LIGHTS FADE.

For Noreen

"The thing about grief is...
..it's hard to give away
because it's the last thing you gave to me"

-Clare Bowditch ('The Thing About Grief')